

042401 - This fact sheet provides information on recent activity for the Portland Harbor Superfund site. This six-mile stretch of the Willamette was added to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) National Priority List on December 1, 2000. Portland Harbor is a Superfund site because the river sediments are contaminated with metals, pesticides, PCB's and petroleum products.

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Working Together to Clean Up Portland Harbor: Memorandum of Understanding is Signed!

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Oregon Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) are working together to determine how the Superfund cleanup should proceed and how all the parties will coordinate. EPA and DEQ are part of a larger project team that includes three natural resource trustee agencies and six tribal governments. The natural resource trustee agencies are U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. The tribal governments are the Siletz, Grand Ronde, Yakama, Umatilla, Warm Springs and Nez Perce.

This team of agency and tribal representatives has developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that outlines coordination between all parties and lists specific EPA and DEQ responsibilities. According to EPA Project Manager Wallace Reid, "This MOU is significant because it provides for participation and involvement of natural resource trustee agencies and tribal governments much earlier than usual in the Superfund process." Portland Harbor is a large and complex project, so the MOU provides the framework for cooperation and which will optimize federal, state and tribal expertise.

Under the agreement, DEQ serves as the lead agency for cleanup work along the banks of the river. The riverbank area above the high water mark is commonly referred to as upland work. DEQ's primary responsibility is to identify and control upland sources of contamination to river sediments. EPA is the lead agency for the in-water work, investigating sediment contamination and determining the risks to humans and wildlife posed by the contaminants. The MOU was effective for EPA and DEQ on February 8, 2001. The other project team members become parties to the agreement as they sign on. This MOU represents the commitment of all these parties to work together as this project goes forward, solving issues that arise during the cleanup process.

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What is a MOU?

The Memorandum of Understanding is a document that provides a written record of agreement between the agencies and tribes involved. A MOU is not required, but Portland Harbor is unique because of the large number of trustees and tribes participating in the process. The MOU establishes:

- ❑ DEQ as the lead agency at upland site, continuing its cleanup work along the banks of the river, using its authorities under the State cleanup law;
- ❑ EPA as the lead agency for the in-stream (sediment) investigation and cleanup, using its authority under the federal Superfund law.
- ❑ A Technical Coordination Team and a Legal Coordination Team that will identify and resolve issues during development and implementation of the in-water sediment investigation and uplands cleanup work;
- ❑ How tribal cultural resource issues will be addressed;
- ❑ That EPA will review and have the opportunity to provide comment on key source control decisions proposed by DEQ; and
- ❑ A dispute resolution process that is available to all of the parties who signed the MOU.

Current Happenings

EPA Negotiating With Potentially Responsible Parties: As part of the Superfund process, EPA contacts landowners and business operators who may be responsible for causing contamination. EPA notifies these Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) that they may be responsible for cleaning up the site. In December 2000, EPA mailed letters to 69 PRPs, providing notice that they may have some responsibility in the Portland Harbor cleanup. A subgroup of approximately 20 of these PRPs came forward, and EPA started the process of negotiating the details of the upcoming sediment investigation with them. EPA anticipates that responsible parties will pay for and conduct the sediment investigation. The EPA, DEQ and the rest of the Portland Harbor team will review and approved the work as it proceeds. EPA anticipates starting the in-water investigation this summer.

DEQ Upland Cleanup Work Continues: DEQ continues cleanup activities at sites along the banks of the Harbor at the upland sites. "We are currently cleaning up 44 contaminated sites along the river," stated DEQ Project Manager Eric Blischke. The work ranges from the very early stages of investigation to removal of contaminated soil and other remedial activities. DEQ will be working with EPA and the rest of the project team determining which upland sites are potential sources of sediment contamination, and how upland work will be coordinated with in-water work. Responsible parties are funding all work except at three upland sites.

A complete list of sites and a description of site activity is located on DEQ's web page.

Focus on Cultural Resources: A group consisting of DEQ, EPA, and Tribal representatives has been formed to develop a strategy for addressing cultural resource issues on a harbor-wide basis.

Project Team Visits Portland Harbor site: On May 1, representatives from EPA, DEQ, Tribes, ATSDR and other cooperating agencies examined the Portland Harbor Superfund site by water. This boat trip allowed the project team to get a first hand perspective of the many issues, concerns, challenges and opportunities facing the project team as they investigate and develop a clean up plan for the Portland Harbor site.

Preliminary Public Health Assessment

When you heard that Portland Harbor was listed as a Superfund site, you may have wondered how the contamination might affect you or your family. A federal agency called the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is working on this question and playing an active role in the cleanup of Portland Harbor. The ATSDR is required to assess the potential health risks to the public from Superfund sites within one year of the site being proposed for listing. The ATSDR looks at possible ways the contaminants could reach humans through the air, water, soil or food chain. Representatives from ATSDR are already working with EPA and the Oregon Health Department, and will be providing some preliminary information later this year. For more information on ATSDR's work on Portland Harbor, contact Dan Holcomb, ATSDR Health Communications Specialist at 404-639-6064 or dwh6@cdc.gov. You can also visit their website at www.atsdr.cdc.gov

Understanding Technical Information

Your participation is an important part of the decision making process for the Portland Harbor Superfund site. The EPA and DEQ will be providing many opportunities for public involvement during the planning and decision making process for Portland Harbor. Since some of the information is very technical in nature, the EPA will be awarding a Technical Assistance Grant (TAG) to a community group to help explain technical information and share it with members of the community. The availability of the TAG was advertised last year and EPA is in the process of reviewing the application it received from Willamette Riverkeeper, a local environmental group. EPA anticipates awarding the grant this summer. The grant funding is intended to help the local community understand and participate in the cleanup process.

Later this spring, EPA and DEQ will develop a joint public involvement plan to reflect both DEQ's upland and EPA's in-stream activities. Starting with the DEQ's Draft Public Involvement Strategy, the two agencies will focus on creating opportunities for meaningful participation in the state and federal cleanup planning process. Look for a fact sheet in the near future asking how you would like to participate. You may have information or insight that can help project manager make better decisions about the Portland Harbor Superfund site.

How You Can Get Involved

Organize a Meeting: DEQ and EPA would like to meet with your organization to answer questions and provide information about Portland Harbor. If you would like project team representatives to meet with your group, please contact Community Involvement Coordinators Kim Cox or Judy Smith.

Call or e-mail a Request:

Judy R. Smith
EPA Community Involvement Coordinator
206-553-6246 or 800-424-4372
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Kim Cox

DEQ Portland Harbor Project Coordinator
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Visit the EPA or DEQ Portland Harbor websites:

EPA Region 10 website:
<http://www.epa.gov/r10earth/>
Click on "Index", then "P," then "Portland Harbor."

DEQ website:
<http://www.deq.state.or.us>
Click on "Programs," then "Environmental Cleanup and Spills," and then "Portland Harbor."

To ensure effective communication with everyone, additional services can be made available to persons with disabilities by contacting one of the EPA representatives listed above.